

RHODES AND THE UTILIZATION OF ITALIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract

Cultural tourism, a rapidly growing segment of the tourism industry, thrives on the exploration of both tangible and intangible cultural assets. This article examines the Italian architectural legacy in the Dodecanese Islands, particularly focusing on Rhodes, Kos, and Leros, where Italian occupation from 1912 to 1943 left a profound cultural imprint. Through an analysis of key monuments—such as the Grande Albergo delle Rose, Palazzo del Governatore, and Campochiaro village—the article highlights their historical significance, architectural uniqueness, and role in shaping local identities. It underscores the strategic potential of these sites for cultural tourism development, emphasizing the need for preservation, restoration, and integration into the islands' tourism identity. Challenges such as funding constraints and maintenance issues are explored alongside opportunities for themed tours and events that can enrich visitors' experiences and bolster local economies. The article concludes by advocating for a collaborative approach to promote Italian cultural heritage as a cornerstone of the Dodecanese's tourism strategy, enhancing Rhodes' position as a premier cultural destination in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Key Words: *Rhodes, Italian Cultural Heritage, Cultural Tourism, Dodecanese Islands, Local Economies*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism is one of the most dynamically developing forms of tourism worldwide. It involves the search for and enjoyment of the culture of a destination, which includes both tangible and intangible cultural assets (Richards, 2007). This type of tourism focuses on visits to museums, archaeological sites, monuments, theatrical performances, festivals, as well as the experience of local culture, traditions, and customs. Visitors engaged in cultural tourism are interested in learning about the history, architecture, art, and traditions of a place, connecting with its cultural heritage, and understanding the social and cultural structures that shape its identity (Smith, 2003). In this context, cultural tourism is not only about enjoying the past but also about understanding the present and shaping the future of a region. Travelers seek authentic experiences connected to the culture of their destination, and this growing demand makes cultural tourism a vital part of the tourism industry.

This article examines the Italian monuments in the Dodecanese and the cultural routes developed around them, analysing their importance and the prospects for tourism development through cultural tourism. The cases of Rhodes, Kos and Leros highlight the influence of Italian architecture on the islands and their value as historical documents but also as cultural and tourist assets (Manola, 2022).

The Dodecanese Islands, a region located in the heart of the Aegean Sea, are a fascinating crossroads of cultures and history. Their geographical location, close to Minor Asia and the Middle East, as well as the successive periods of domination and influence by various people, have left indelible marks on their identity. The Italians were among the most important foreign dynasties that imposed their presence on these islands, mainly during the period from 1912 to 1943. The Italian occupation, although it was a foreign imposition, left behind a legacy of remarkable architectural and cultural value (Gertwagen and D'Onofrio, 2018). Italian intervention was not limited to military purposes but had wider cultural and aesthetic ambitions, with the ultimate goal of making the Dodecanese a high-end tourist destination for the Italian elite (Baldwin's, 2000).

2. RHODES

Rhodes, the fourth largest island of Greece and the largest of the Dodecanese, is one of the country's most iconic tourist destinations (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2020). From ancient times until today, Rhodes has been a point of reference for its beauty, its culture and its historical importance. The rich history of the island is reflected through the monuments and architectural works that adorn the place, with the best-known as belonging to the Medieval period, when the island was under the rule of the Knights of St. John (Mallouchou and Tufano, 2004).

However, beyond the medieval buildings, the monuments of the Italian occupation, which were erected during the thirty years (1912-1943) that Rhodes was under Italian rule, are of particular importance. These buildings, which were originally built to serve the needs of the Italian settlers, are today important attractions of the island and are an integral part of the cultural heritage of Rhodes (Kechagioglou, 2010).

2.1. The Italian Period in the Dodecanese and the Treaty of Sèvres

Before Rhodes and the rest of the Dodecanese joined Greece, the island was under Italian rule from 1912 to 1943. Italy occupied the Dodecanese during the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912 and kept them under its rule until World War II. The Treaty of Sèvres of 1920, which was never ratified, provided for the cession of the Dodecanese to Greece, except for Rhodes, which would remain under Italian administration with the prospect of joining Greece in the event of a referendum. Despite the failure of this treaty, the Dodecanese passed to Greece in 1947, with the Treaty of Paris.

The period of Italian rule was characterized by intense architectural activity (Bollati, 1987) and Mocchi and Gaddi 2005), with the aim of creating an Italian identity in the Dodecanese. The Italians engaged in the construction (Collection of Dodecanese Newspapers of the Library of the Hellenic Parliament) of public buildings, military installations, churches and infrastructure distinguished by their imposing architecture and their neoclassical and rationalist influences (Mazower's, 1993).

3. THE MONUMENTS OF THE ITALIAN OCCUPATION IN RHODES

The Italian period left behind an important architectural legacy (Bollati, 1987). L'Italia a Rodi A specialist project focusing on Italian monuments in Rhodes and the rest of the Dodecanese, analyzing their architecture and cultural significance.in Rhodes, which includes some of the most impressive and characteristic buildings on the island. These buildings, many of which are now attractions, are kept in good condition and continue to attract the interest of visitors (Manola and Koltsikoglou, 2024) .

3.1. Grande Albergo delle Rose:

One of the most iconic buildings of this period is the Grande Albergo delle Rose, built in 1927. The hotel, designed by the Italian architect Florestano Di Fausto, is an excellent example of the meeting of European architecture with the local elements of Rhodes. The Grande Albergo delle Rose was the centre of the island's social life during the Italian occupation and today operates as a casino and luxury hotel, maintaining its original glory.

3.2. Palazzo del Governatore di Rodi:

The Palazzo del Governatore di Rodi (Governor of Rhodes) is another great monument of the Italian period, built to house the administrative services of the Italians on the island. This building, with its characteristic fascist architecture, combines elements of medieval and neoclassical architecture, and today functions as the Headquarters of the South Aegean Region.

3.3. Casa del Fascio di Rodi:

The Casa del Fascio di Rodi, which was the headquarters of the Italian Fascist party in Rhodes, is another important building of this era. This building is representative of the rationalist style promoted by Mussolini's regime, with its simple lines and austere form. Today, Casa del Fascio is used as a public building, preserving the characteristics of the era of its construction.

3.4. Church of San Marco:

The Church of San Marco is one of the few Catholic churches built in Rhodes during the period of Italian rule. This building, with the simplicity and austerity of Italian architecture, combines religious elements with modernist tendencies, and still functions as a religious centre for the Catholic community of Rhodes.

3.5. Rhodes Aquarium:

The Aquarium of Rhodes (Museo di Scienze Naturali di Rodi) is another characteristic work of the Italian period, which was built in 1935. The building, located at the northern end of Rhodes Town, combines elements of art deco and modernism, and today houses one of the most well-known aquariums of Greece. The Aquarium remains one of the most popular tourist attractions of the island, combining scientific research with tourism development.

3.6. Aktaeon:

Aktaion, one of the most characteristic buildings of the Italian period in Rhodes, was built in the 1920s. It originally functioned as a recreation and café area for the island's Italian society, combining elements of neoclassical and renaissance architecture with modern strokes. Aktaeon, with its prominent position on the coastal avenue of the city of Rhodes, contributed to shaping the social life of the island. Today, this building has been restored and functions as

a restaurant and cafe, maintaining its original character and offering visitors the opportunity to enjoy the unique view of the Aegean Sea.

3.7. The Village of Campochiaro (Campos):

Another interesting example of Italian architectural heritage in Rhodes is the village of Campochiaro, today known as Eleusa. This village was designed and built by the Italians in the 1930s to accommodate Italian farmers and military personnel. Campochiaro is a typical example of the agrarian policy of the Italian regime, which sought to create self-sufficient communities with modern infrastructure. The village is distinguished by its geometric designs, spacious buildings and squares, which demonstrate the influence of fascist ideology on architecture. Despite today's abandonment and the ravages of time, Campochiaro is an interesting historical monument and object of study for Italian architecture in the area.

4. ITALIAN MONUMENTS IN LEROS AND KOS

Apart from Rhodes, important Italian monuments are also found on other islands of the Dodecanese, such as Leros and Kos, which were also under Italian rule during the same period (Manola, 2024) . Leros, known as the "island of Artemis" during the period of the Italian occupation, was a strategic centre for the Italians thanks to its geographical position and its natural port (Kontogiorgi, 2006). Important military facilities and infrastructure were built on the island, such as the fortress on the hill of Pitiki, the camps in Lakki, as well as a hospital. Lakki, designed by the architect Armando Bernabiti, is a typical example of the rationalist style of the time and is unique in Greece for its size and urban planning (Giannopoulou, 2015) Today, the Italianate buildings of Leros attract tourists interested in connecting the military history with the special architectural heritage of the island (Manola, 2024) .

The geographical location of Leros and the existence of the deepest natural harbor in the Eastern Mediterranean turned the island into an ultramodern naval base for its time and a stronghold for the Italian effort to influence the politics of the wider region, obstructing the United Kingdom's plans to penetrate the Middle East.

On the eastern side of Lakki (Savvidis, 2019), , there is a labyrinth of underground tunnels with rooms that served soldiers, such as dormitories, offices, ammunition halls, etc. Today, it is part of the YNTEL complex, which provides technical support and supplies to the Navy, with access to its interior permitted only with special authorization. Another significant monument of military architecture is the aerophone. Despite the abandonment of the military monuments from the Italian occupation, plans are underway to promote them for tourism, focusing on both the tangible and intangible heritage, with routes that will have organized signage.

However, Mussolini also envisioned Portolago as a holiday destination and enhanced the area with a series of significant rationalist architectural buildings that adorned the newly planned city. This effort strengthens the initiative of local authorities to have the entire city included in UNESCO's list of World Cultural Heritage sites.

In Kos, the Italians implemented an ambitious program of reconstruction of the city after the devastating earthquake of 1933. Among the most important projects of that period are the Archaeological School, the central market of the city, and the Casa del Fascio building (Doulkeri, 2008) The Italians also used excavations to highlight ancient monuments, seeking a synthesis of the new with the old. The coexistence of ancient Greek and Italian architecture gives the place a unique sense of historical continuity, and Kos remains an island where the Italian influence is clearly present (Papachristodoulou, 2012).

5. THE CURRENT UTILIZATION OF THE ITALIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE IN RHODES

The exploitation of the Italian cultural heritage in Rhodes (Makrides, 2005) is an important field of action for the local authorities and the tourism industry of the island. Italian monuments are not only historical monuments but also a source of economic development as they attract thousands of visitors every year. However, the full integration of these monuments into the tourism identity of Rhodes has not yet been fully achieved (Manola et al., 2023).

5.1 Challenges and Opportunities

The restoration and maintenance of Italian buildings is a challenge, as many of them face deterioration due to age and lack of systematic maintenance (The Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2020). Despite restoration efforts, the need for further funding and support is imperative, as these buildings form an important part of the island's cultural identity (Maniou et al., 2024; Maniou et al., 2025; Maniou & Mitoula, 2025). However, the opportunities offered by the Italian cultural heritage are many. Viewing these monuments can enhance the cultural profile of Rhodes, offering visitors a deeper understanding of the island's multicultural history. In addition, organizing themed tours and cultural events around these buildings can attract a more specialized and culturally aware tourism (Manola et al., 2024; Maniou et al., 2024; Maniou, 2024b; Maniou et al., 2024).

CONCLUSIONS AND EPILOGUE

Rhodes, with its rich and diverse history, is a place where cultural heritage is omnipresent. The Italian period, although short compared to the rest of the island's history, left an indelible mark on the architectural and cultural landscape of Rhodes. The monuments of this era, from the Grande Albergo delle Rose to the Campochiaro, are living testimonies of an era that combined the European architectural tradition with the local environment.

The preservation and promotion of this heritage is crucial for the preservation of historical memory and the promotion of cultural tourism on the island. Despite the challenges facing the maintenance of these monuments, the opportunities arising from their exploitation are enormous. Rhodes has the potential to strengthen its position as a leading cultural destination in the Eastern Mediterranean, attracting visitors interested in history, architecture and cultural diversity.

In summary, the exploitation of the Italian cultural heritage in Rhodes is not only a matter of preservation and preservation of the monuments. It is also an opportunity to promote the island's cultural identity and create new possibilities for tourism development. Rhodes, with its unique combination of history and culture, has all the conditions to continue to charm its visitors and offer unforgettable experiences that combine the past with the present and the future.

The Italian monuments located in various parts of the island are testimonies of a period which, despite the adversities, made a decisive contribution to the formation of modern Rhodes. These buildings, with their particular architecture and historical significance, offer a wealth of information not only about the era of Italian rule but also about the development of Rhodesian society as a whole (Mazower's, 1993).

The conscious effort to highlight and promote these monuments can strengthen the cultural identity of Rhodes and make it an even more attractive destination for cultural tourism. By enhancing its cultural heritage and integrating it into the modern tourism map,

Rhodes can differentiate itself from other destinations, attracting visitors seeking authentic experiences and a deeper understanding of history.

This project requires, of course, a well-planned strategy of cooperation between the local government, tourism operators, cultural organizations and the local community. The restoration, preservation and promotion of Italian monuments can act as a driving force for the revitalization of the local economy and the enhancement of cultural heritage.

In conclusion, Rhodes has the potential to highlight its Italian heritage as an important element of its tourism identity, combining its centuries-old history with modern cultural tourism. The exploitation of these unique monuments can offer new perspectives for the development of the island, offering visitors a rich cultural experience and contributing to the preservation and strengthening of historical memory.

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